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The University of Montana

NEWS RELEASE

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Missoula, MT 59812
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Aug. 21, 1995

MBQ FOCUSES ON BITTERROOT TRAFFIC, TOURISM

MISSOULA --

Traffic on the Bitterroot Valley stretch of Highway 93 is already a nightmare, and tourists should not be encouraged to come to the valley unless the highway is widened to four lanes, according to survey responses in the most recent issue of the Montana Business Quarterly, published by The University of Montana Bureau of Business and Economic Research.

"There is nothing worse for morale than to be stuck in a traffic jam of seasonal traffic while on the way to work," says one Bitterroot resident who responded to a survey developed by UM's Institute for Tourism and Recreation Research, Travel Montana and the Montana State University Extension Service.

Summertime traffic is 20 percent higher on that stretch of the highway than traffic the rest of the year, according to the Quarterly article, "Traffic and Tourism in the Bitterroot: Tourism Promotion, Development, and Management." The article was written by Nancy Lee Menning, director of UM's Institute for Tourism and Recreation Research.

Even though the Montana Department of Transportation gives the Highway 93 corridors north and south of Missoula a poor Level of Service (LOS) rating, improvements may be slow to come because of threatened budget cuts from the federal government, says Stan Nicholson, author of the Quarterly article "Fueling Montana Highways: The Role of Federal Transfers."

"At present Montana receives over \$6 in federal transfers for every \$1 we invest in

-more-

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qualifying highway improvements," Nicholson says. "That degree of leverage may very well be reduced in coming years."

About half of Montana's total highway program budget comes from federal transfers, and DOT officials expect at least a 20 percent reduction in that federal match -- down by about \$30 million beginning in October 1995, according to the article.

"How will our state legislators respond?" asks Nicholson. "Cut the broadly supported highway program? Raise the taxes? These budgetary questions add up to a delicious dilemma -- one that could offer some far-reaching and creative opportunities for that famous old Montana self-reliance."

Other articles in the summer issue of Montana Business Quarterly include "Putting a Price Tag on Nature," which addresses economic evaluation of the environment, and "Have Computer and Fax Modem, Will Travel," which discusses a growing group of free-lance professionals who are abandoning jobs in big cities to come to Montana.

The latest Quarterly is available for \$6 from The University of Montana Bureau of Business and Economic Research, Missoula, MT 59812, (406) 243-5113. A one-year subscription costs \$25.

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